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Ma n'zira ba, etc., does not mean "great baobab of man." The real meaning is: "O man who is a great baobab." In writing it I prefer a "z" to an "a." Usually the Bambara soften the hard sound by a euphonious little "n." With a hard "s" the word sira cannot be distinguished from the word "tobacco": sira siramougou, "snuff tobacco"; n'ziremougou, "baobab flour."

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776 782 a purely Bambara term to express their idea /of these spirits/, and they to the word djiné; they call them gnéna.

776 782 177 798 Before the arrival of the Moslems, the Negro sacrificed to beings to whom they have attributed bodies and souls, although imponderable and invisible, who are intermediate between men and angels and whom the Arabs call الجن el djiné. But they also sacrificed to evil beings, superior to the former in power, whom they call boli. The legend of the boli, an ironic legend which I will tell in full when I discuss this matter, is sufficient proof of this belief. For the Moslems of the Sudan only two things here below /70/ are worthy of attention: Mecca (Makka) and Stamboul -- old Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Constantinople -- who in their eyes, as in the eyes of all Moslems of our colonies, is the great Pope of Islam. Everything that does not bear the stamp of Mecca, everything that does not come from Stamboul, is to be rejected and scorned. Thus the Bambara, fertile in expedients, quickly managed to find a way out of their discussions with the propagators of Islam: "All our boli come from Mecca," was their weapon of war.

776 177 798 The Bambara were pursued from every side, unable to perform publicly even religious ceremonies in honor of simple genii. Can one believe that they added others that were still more terrible? As conquerors the Moslems have always ruthlessly opposed idolatry, destroying its temples and overthrowing its altars. "Believe or die" has always been their motto and always will be as long as they feel

776 strong. Is it not a fact that this law still operated forcefully at the
777 time of the last kings of Segou, when El-Hadj-Omar (1) took the
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1. El-Hadj-Omar ("Omar the Pilgrim"), so named because, it is said, he made the journey to Mecca.

crown from the pagan king Mary to give it to his son Ahmadou (2)?

2. Bambara translation of the word Ahmed.

It was Ahmadou who held captive our explorers Mage and Quintin, and at the death of his father he left for Yamina and then for Nioro, leaving the crown to his son Madani. For those Bambara who were incautious, whose fetishes were seized, or who were caught sacrificing, the consequences were the confiscation of possessions, imprisonment, slavery, and death. The huge area where the native cemetery and
[764] the European cemetery (3) are found at present was soaked with the

3. There are two European cemeteries at Ségou. The first is at the entrance of the city on the south side. The second, the only one in which burial takes place at present, is on the edge of the native cemetery, south on the road from Sens and Koutiala, about 300 or 400 meters from the city.

blood of pagans. Who will ever know how many heads rolled at that time for a purely religious purpose! On some days the arm of the executioner stopped only because it was tired and unable to strike -- so I was told by some Negroes who owed their /71/ lives to this fatigue. And I believe them, for the greatest praise that the story-tellers /griots/ accord these tyrants is that they knew how to cut off heads. The legend that the boli came from Mecca was born inevitably

776 177 798 out of the Bambara's need to soften their crime of idolatry and to preserve it by lending it extenuating circumstances. If the cradle of Islam is Mecca, if its superiority is derived from the holiness of that city, chosen and beloved by God (1), what can the Moslems want of

1. See what I said above on the subject of Mecca and Stamboul.

him, the Bambara, whose religion comes from this same much vaunted city? And if the God of Whom the Moslems preached to the Bambara has decreed everything (2), good and evil, if He is the Author of both

2. See the Koran: VI, v. 3 - 39; X, v. 99; XIV, v. 4; XVII, v. 32; XXXVI, v. 6, 7, 8, 9; LIII, v. 43, 44, 45 - 49; LXXVI, v. 29; LXXX, v. 29; etc.

good and evil and leads each person along the course that pleases Him to such a degree that he no longer has freedom of choice, why wish to take from them that which God has given them, that which comes to them from the holy city of Mecca!

776 796 782 [192] The Bambara term for the boli is gna. Their idea of them corresponds closely to the Arab concept of the chéitane شيطان, and in everyday language, they define them by a single word: sétané, "satan," even though this word is never on their lips in the sacrifices. In their nocturnal orgies and religious dances, the Negroes' notion of the genie to which they are sacrificing are shown in concrete form. And when, in their religious ceremonies in honor of the Komo, Kono, [178] Nama, etc., the spirit appears by the glow of little fires lit in the sacred woods, decked out in a cloak of feathers, his head hidden in a huge horned mask that has nothing human about it, one cannot help 776 796 thinking of the tales of old Breton grandmothers, told on a winter evening in the stables. The blasting of trumpets, bamboos, and koba 534 782 horns (3), the tinkling of /72/ the little bell, and the shouts of the

631 ("great sorcerer who has communication with the invisible beings"), lived at Ségou with his court. At the head of each of his provinces he had a minister responsible for levying the tax (/this man was/ his tool, often one of his children, to whom -- doubtless for this reason -- was given the title of Fama, petty king. The minister did his work through the intermediary of the heads of cantons, or kafotigi, under who, with respect to civil matters, were all the heads of villages, the gnéna-n-sonnaba, or dougoutigi. /100/

The levying of the tax often gave rise to disputes between the kafotigi and the dougoutigi, and the latter would resign from his functions or be relieved of them. After that he lost all civil powers but none of his religious or priestly authority, and since the religious sphere had precedence over the civil, he kept his title of dougoutigi in his role as gnéna-n-sonnaba. The one who replaced him /in the civil sphere/ was never anything but an upstart and worthy only of the name sotigi ("head of houses"), although his responsibility became hereditary.

798 193 621 Under Moslem domination the worship of the gnéna, or djiné, was forbidden and punished by very severe penalties (slavery or death). It can thus be believed that it was to the advantage of the gnena-n-sonnaba to keep their position quiet, to refuse the title of dougoutigi, and even to forbid their people to bestow it on them. In Bani country and among the Bambara of Sikasso and Koutiala, where Moslem domination was never solidly established, there was no cause for similar fears, and it is understandable that the custom of calling the religious head dougoutigi and the civil head sotigi has been retained.

621 193 The gnéna-n-sonnaba, or dougoutigi, is helped in his duties by a siéré (aide, deputy); the heads of quarters (sotigi) and the heads of families (gouatigi) make up his council. Nothing important is done in the village without consulting its head, who calls all his elders together and decides nothing without them. All of them are also present at any sacrifice if it is offered by a family, and it is not unusual to see them going single file, evening or morning, to the sacred grove of the fetish. On the morning of a marriage, they always go there.

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whole circle in the dry season. For example, the master of a Nama will give an account, and the storyteller will take up the refrain, which always ends: "I have told you truly, the Nama can refrain from evil, but it is capable only of evil (a ka fari, a ka djougou ko djougou). It is evil, very evil!"

776 theless refrain from an evil act and thus indirectly grant a blessing to human beings. The words of the formula in the sacrifices to the gnéna and the gnâ seem identical, and yet, when one has understood the inmost feelings of the Bambara soul, one sees all the difference between them. To one as to the other the Negroes say: "Ka dji d'amma (give us water), ka mousoou d'amma (give us wives), ka nafolo d'amma (give us wealth), etc." But while in speaking to the first they actually ask for water, wives, etc., they make an indirect request to the second, so that their words mean: "Do nothing to keep us from having wives," "do nothing to keep us from having water," etc. In expressing himself this way he uses all his cunning, and all his deceit comes to the surface and is revealed. Yes, he really deserves the epithet that neighboring tribes have given him and of which he is proud; it is misi bo, "cow dung," -- dry on the outside but limp and soft inside, so that it is squashed when it is stepped on. His inner feeling when he addresses the boli is this: "O Spirits, evil genii, you are capable only of evil; may your hatred not attack me or those who are dear to me, may it all be for my enemies and those that can harm me!" /130/

2. The Legend of the Boli

771 This is a very curious legend, for it makes the boli come from
798 Mecca, the holy city! To understand it better, let us remember in
778 passing that Islam has only made the Bambara more attached to their idols. They have died in order to keep them; they answered the

771 "believe or die" of the Moslems by taking up their spears, and when
798 they were conquered, reduced to servitude, and unable to continue
778 their worship openly, they remained true to the faith they received from their ancestors. Severed heads became the prey of vultures, and spilled blood flowed, but those that survived only became hardened. The Moslem conquerors, tired of striking and in need of slaves and manpower, had to admit their defeat in the field of religion.

Some fell away from the idols (slaves, and some rich people seeking to safeguard their lives and possessions), but their apostasy was strictly external and a lie, for they shouted the formula but in secret devoted themselves to their bloody rites, imbuing their children with their own faith and not that of their masters. A lie has never [517] been difficult for the Bambara; to know how to lie is for them more than half a virtue. Thus, when the right to freedom was proclaimed [567] in 1907, I was not at all surprised to see that out of nearly 5,000 slaves who spontaneously set themselves free, the majority returned to their homes or to the land of their fathers, forgot the formula, and declared themselves to be fetishists. They did not get initiated then since they already had been (1).

1. Those who took back their own freedom in 1907 were all slaves of the Moslems. The "Peulls" /Fulani/, a shepherd people, saw almost all their slaves escape. The Bambara in slavery kept their traditions as well as they could; in the Negro village of Biskra I found sons of the Bambara who did not know their own language and were fanatical Moslems, yet kept their tattoos, sacrificed to the family boli handed down by their fathers, danced the dance of the korodouga, and used the Bambara formulas and songs although they no longer understood them.

198 Since all the Bambara could not be made to submit to shameful
171 servitude, the Moslems were satisfied to impose a tax, to forbid
178 public worship of the idols, and, with sheathed sword, sought to make converts by persuasion. Their caravans were quick to cover the country, preaching Islam in all places both favorable and unfavorable, but the mass of the people could not be approached. In order to give /131/ their beliefs a rational basis, they always did everything in the name of "Alla, " "Stamboul" (the Sultan of Constantinople), and "Makka (Mecca), and said to the conqueror: "All true belief comes from Mecca (Makka); it is the center of all religious life, so why do you fight so hard against our boli? They all come from Mecca. God has given you the formula: 'there is no Divinity other than God and Mohammed is His prophet'; for you He prescribes ablutions, Friday rest, etc.. Keep your formula and shout it! To us Bambara He has given the boli and bloody sacrifices, so why do you want to take from us our treasures that are hungry for blood?" I do not doubt that we owe
173 our "legend" to the discussions which arose between the m'rabet (the
176 marabout, or Moslem priest) and the gnâtigi, or bolitigi. Here it is
194 as I so often heard it told by bold old men:

A group of youths who were devoting themselves to trade and following lady luck (ou toumbe kolo (1) gnini, "they were seeking

[136] 1. Kolo, "cowrie shells" (singular, koké), small shells used as money.

cowrie shells"), one day took the road to the east. Over mountains and valleys the little band walked and walked for a long time, and then finally they reached the great, blue, salty water, the ocean, on the shores of which lies the holy city, Mecca (Makka) (2).

[823] 2. Since the Moslems said that Mecca was located on the seacoast, and since the Bambara did not know Arabia, they believed it to be in this direction. In their minds the ocean does not have to be crossed to get there. Actually, this is the least of their worries.